

Squared Circle Intentionalities: What a Framework for “Wrestling Studies” Can Look Like

GARRET L. CASTLEBERRY

I once had a brilliant professor (later my PhD advisor) who both understood and embodied the art of oratorical performance in the classroom arena. Several times I recall he carried in a comically large stack of books, each one balanced atop the other. “The Mad Man,” as whisperers would refer to him, was a master of academic props. Along with charismatic mic work, this career intellectual evolved into a full professorial persona—a showman capable of translating wisdom into verbal spectacle. On the occasion when the impossibly tall stack of books made a cameo appearance, this larger-than-life figure strategically worked their product placement into his mid-lecture monologue. The Mad Man whistled through title and author, giving the most pertinent information about what made each text unique. These resources represent valuable information as much as they demonstrate the hard work and mastery of one’s field of interest. This professor’s gimmick was to educate but also inspire, his precision calculated yet entertaining.

Perhaps I was drawn to the Mad Man due to such performative prowess. Perhaps I felt complemented by his flexibility and respect for rhetorical thought and mixed methods interest. In truth it was a healthy combination of the two—the master and the apprentice, the performer and the understudy, the Main Card draw and the aca-fan understudy. In the spirit of this real-life professor’s underground university infamy and elocutionary bravado, my goal with this essay is deceptively simple. I hope to establish several exciting potentialities and rigorous possibilities for present and future pro-wrestling scholars to consider. While I frame this expression with interdisciplinary openness, I settle on a preferred method conjoining the disciplines of media studies, communication studies, and television studies. Ultimately, I hope this roadmap inspires future students, faculty, scholars, and independent researchers to consider the intriguing directions ready for pro-wrestling studies to embrace.

What does wrestling studies seek to interrogate? Is there need for further intersection between audience and fan studies, theories in aesthetics studies, and

The Popular Culture Studies Journal, Vol. 6, No. 1

Copyright © 2018

seeing popular culture as an interdisciplinary convergence of possibilities? This essay's goal is to provide several possible directions that emerging scholars can take when studying professional wrestling. This is not an attempt to cover or provide a "complete literature" of any single field or discipline. On the contrary, I hope to introduce scholars and readers outside of academia to possible ideas and avenues that inspire new interests and generate momentum in diverse research directions. Just as this essay suggests complementary as well as competing theories and methods for future scholarly consideration, I end with the proposal of a television studies model that encourages maximum rigor from pro-wrestling scholars to elevate and legitimize the potentialities of professional wrestling studies.

Wrestling with and for "Mainstream" Credibility

The field of popular culture studies, a broadly interdisciplinary category within the humanities, continues to blossom despite ongoing yet healthy epistemological resistance from some in the social and hard sciences. Perceptions of what higher education was, is, and should be can only benefit from productive dialogue and continued negotiation. Progress is a historically slow process to accommodate maximum consideration from eager progressives and traditionally conservative values. Yet recent years have shown accelerated interest and cultural capital in areas of pop culture study. With continued convergences between communication technologies, preferences in cultural taste and entertainment are more plural than ever. In the spirit of plurality, I present an overview of key texts that inform a television studies model of analysis for pro-wrestling studies to consider.

Wrestling scholarship is unfortunately low at this point while the proliferation of mainstream and independent performances and content increases in diversity and quantity. Like the sports entertainment genre, mainstream recognition poses distinctly relatable challenges (Fraade-Blamar and Glazer; Williams; Dundas; Shoemaker; Buckwood). For pro wrestling, a struggle always exists in the tension to embrace versus repel its genre conventions that link to carnival and the grotesque (Fiske 245). On one hand, a key point in the popularity of professional wrestling lies in its ability to speak to low-brow aesthetics in the tradition of the traveling circus show. In some ways, both traditional and contemporary wrestling play to the strengths of the circus performer, either through gargantuan "extreme"

bodies or high-flying acrobatics that perform the illusion of the tightrope walker's "fall." Except while tightrope walkers must never fall (for fear of injury or death), the pro wrestlers must always fall as point of intent. Arguably, no fall highlights the carnival/mainstream tension like the top rope fall in which the performer must land in that most sacred and sensitive of areas, hitting the ropes exactly between the legs. In live performance, such visualization signifies the very definition of "low-brow" and thus will always face public scrutiny from certain critical circles.

Wrestling scholarship shares a similar uphill battle. Already the humanities combat extinction through strategic defunding (Wright; Mitchell; Goldberg; Ruben; Smith). Limited financial institutional support benefits the classically-trained rhetorician, who can research and report without investing in physically expensive data collection processes. Likewise, the cultural studies critic can maximize theoretical legwork through inter-library loans or broader digitally-based investigations. Performance studies practitioners may be able to draw public attention to the physical and psychological communiqué required for pro wrestling storytelling by practicing synthesis between performative acts in minimalist conditions. Finally, the ethnographer-as-participant fan can gain rigorous insights accessed through personal passion and active networking. This liminal role holds the potential to reward pro wrestling scholars with new insights into a distinct and time-tested entertainment medium, one of limited scholarly approach beyond broad ideological assessments and close textual analysis. Ultimately, digital expansions offer each of these approaches extended access to pro wrestling potentialities at vary degrees of physical or interactive proximity. In the following sub-sections, I expand upon several of these previewed categories while continuing toward a final proposal that advocates a TV studies model for pro wrestling studies research.

Bare Knuckle Methods for Qualitative and Critical Inquiry

One of the quintessential tools taught throughout research methods courses is content analysis (Berelson; Krippendorff; Weber). Certainly, space exists to suggest the importance that content analysis or constant comparative analysis already plays for fans and must now play for scholars. With the advent of Internet streaming services such as the WWE Network, TV Asahi's New Japan Pro Wrestling World (Caldwell), and now products like FloSlam TV for Roku,

previously un-accessible content can be mined for data sets and contextual accuracy (minus certain expired music copyrights). Pro wrestling's evolving digital archives recreate history in ways that could theoretically invite historians, media theorists, cultural critics, and social scientists to observe and report on streaming content old and new. Whether focused on counting occurrence with content analysis or comparatively developing themes, such analyses could provide in-depth readings and understandings of wrestlers, characters, matches, promotions, and more.

Just as content analysis and constant comparative analysis emerge as qualitative methods that naturally extend to digital streaming archives, psychoanalytics may provide unique interpretations for fans and performers tethered to pro wrestling practices. Wrestling scholars could employ several theoretical analytic close readings from wrestling storylines and even more so in examining the genre's storytelling frameworks. One example might be to assess how Freud's *pleasure principle* works upon audience expectations whenever storylines or character arcs stretch too far or resolve too quickly (see Eagleton; Marcus). Psychoanalytics could tie into wrestling through the oft-repeated legacy arcs of storytelling. Certain well-known families achieve self-promoting mythologies that tailor toward melodramatic infighting associative to daytime or even primetime soap operas. Infighting may include tensions between fathers and sons, mothers and fathers, sibling rivalries, and even patriarchies at war with one another. Such storytelling symbolism repeats incarnations of the Oedipal and Elektra Complex, respectively. There are numerous recurring Shakespearian qualities repeated throughout pro wrestling history where, for example, young up-and-comers must face the gauntlet of established masculinities representing the status quo or even an aged regime.

Thus, literary theory and traditional textual analysis also lend possible utility for pro-wrestling scholarship. In terms of linking qualitative forms with cognitive close reading, phenomenology lends itself to ongoing use and usage for wrestling scholars. The same can also be said of aesthetics studies, inspecting aesthetic phenomenon at both the individual level—the wrestler, the organization—or at the technological level, as with evolving integrated marketing techniques and global brand awareness. Pro wrestling is nothing if not a case study in visual storytelling. In the next section I link together several visual analysis options for pro wrestling researchers to consider.

From Visual Culture to Physical Performance

Given the onset of high definition technologies in the mid-2000s, wrestling was forced to evolve into an even grander visual spectacle. The product hence opens itself to similar analytic opportunities and even extends into areas of visual analysis. Visual culture and visual rhetoric scholars might consider the evolution of the bodily form as it mimics and possibly even influences publicly shared perceptions of masculinity, femininity, physical beauty, or, quite simply, visuality (Mirzoeff; Berger). Beauty notably cannot be qualified without its visual opposite, and thus the desecration or mutilation of the body, the performance of bodily harm and risk aversion, might be interpreted as appendages to public spectacle and entertainment aesthetics.

Scholarship focused in these directions could extend conversations about visual literacy at a time when digital media literacy converges between and subsequently re-negotiates meanings behind the social, the cultural, and the political. Such thematic convergence speaks to early cultural studies works on aesthetics in *Aesthetics and Politics: The Key Texts of the Classic Debate within German Marxism* (Adorno, Benjamin, et al.) or even updates such as John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*. However, several contemporary texts might allow young wrestling researchers entrance into these aged conversations. In *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*, Gillian Rose explores a plethora of visual methodologies that would benefit from innovative updates within the pro wrestling genre. Likewise, Richard Howells and Joaquim Negreiros's *Visual Culture* is the perfect introductory text that would immediately benefit scholars looking to penetrate the pro wrestling text from a classical approach or methodological lens.

Professional wrestling is, among many things, about storytelling, and while much of wrestling's in-ring action posits visual storytelling, detailed narrative work goes into the production and maintenance of these live and televisual cultural programs. Narrative analysis (Hostein and Gubrium; Reissman) is one way in which scholars can mine the archives of both in-ring and outer-ring storytelling. The resonant strengths and weaknesses relating to collaborative, and indeed physical storytelling, have a lot to say about pro wrestling and how it functions as "sport" or "performance art" or even "Americana." Additionally, when wrestling narratives succeed on a mass scale, they often do so because of the ideological or mythological power of their storytelling style.

As such, mythological analysis offers scholars a way to translate the rhetorical power of wrestling in past, present, and future conditions. Roland Barthes' oft-cited essay "The World of Wrestling," reprinted in *Mythologies* (15-25) could be recognized as the Bruno Sammartino of professional wrestling essays that, for some, has yet to be eclipsed. Claude Levi-Strauss tackles a broader approach that, while not especially interested in wrestling specifically, presents "the science of mythology."¹ Professional wrestling is without a doubt a bodily performance of myth-making. Wrestling characters undergo dramatic challenges that pit them in situations of seemingly insurmountable odds. Whether story arcs reach epic triumphs or tragic consequences, the effects are transformative for the entertainers as well as their fans. As a cultural anthropologist closely associated with structuralism, Levi-Strauss is deeply intrigued by binary opposition and the dualistic tensions that myths present.

Storytelling techniques of close reading should not be limited to myth, as the performative nature of bodies in motion produces dimensional synthesis between pro-wrestling studies and performance studies. Performance studies shares similar outsider qualities with professional wrestling. These commonalities recognize the performative power of the body as a communicative extension of how humans practice theoretical, narrative, metaphorical, allegorical, and even everyday life storytelling. Irving Goffman's notion of performances of everyday life deserves revisiting when possibly paired against pro wrestlers that walk a fine line between getting into character versus disappearing in their character.² WWE's owner and CEO Vince McMahon tells his employees that they are in the "storytelling business" of entertainment, which creates an offshoot distinct from professional wrestling.³ Just as the WWE approaches storytelling through bodily performance,

¹ Wendy Doniger recounts how much of Levi-Strauss's theorizations appeared in *Mythologies* from 1964-1971, but contemporary scholars of myth will find his refined theorizations formalized in *Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture*.

² See Goffman's seminal book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* or Broderick Chow, Eero Lanie, and Claire Warden's excellent contemporary anthology *Performance and Professional Wrestling*, which pulls together scholarly interests in performance studies and pro wrestling.

³ Bully Ray aka Bubba Ray Dudley regularly recited this paraphrasing if not consummate direct quotation from McMahon during his weekly appearances on SiriusXM's *Busted Open Radio* program. Beginning as co-host in early 2017, Bully Ray's insinuations ranged from respectful to

the performance studies discipline approaches processes of theorization, critical praxis, and political activism. With numerous identifiable tropes and conventions practiced between these respective camps, synergy between the two creates a unique avenue whereby scholars can display provocative critiques of both.

Grappling with Media Analysis Techniques

The scholarly arena of media studies provides some of the richest potential for pro wrestling scholars. Given the digital convergence cultivated by the onset of the Internet age, popular culture overlaps with technology and social media with increasing prominence. Convergence culture, as Henry Jenkins coined the phrase, creates gaps whereby wrestling enthusiasts might locate unique data sets, digital archives, social interactions, and rationales for exploring each. As with Jenkins's widely circulated concepts like convergence culture and participatory culture, in *Networked: The New Social Media Operating System*, Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman offer a moldable assessment through the lens of social media thresholds. Their book highlights how much of culture has become networked and this important distinction holds value for pro wrestling ethnographers. Given the race for media attention, an understanding of how networking culture works will aide researchers' ability to accurately archive and assess social media data. Notably, networked cultures also function as promotional cultures. In *Promotional Cultures*, Aeron Davis synthesizes these multi-layered processes into three parts that could form points of analysis for wrestling scholars interested in the blurred lines between social media identity, brand exposure, and the neo-kayfabe of the wrestling persona. With so many independent and mainstream pro wrestlers utilizing personal social media as a natural way to extend their brand (as discussed by wrestlers interviewed by Christopher J. Olson in this collection), a spreadable media model (Jenkins, Ford, and Green) provides aca-fans and digital ethnographers a pivotal analytic method for interpreting how wrestlers negotiate persona success through active channels and individual branding.

The emergence of videographic criticism in recent years remains uncharted territory for wrestling scholars. Accessibility to various media editing software

resigned in that McMahon habitually labels performers' work within WWE as "storytelling" rather than the industry-wide circulated term "wrestling" or pro wrestling.

evolves into a proliferation of uses for industry insiders, fans, and critics. Videographic criticism offers wrestling fans a platform for experimental art-criticism storytelling, a moving image audio-video method for intentional boundary blurring between text→context→reception→reaction. Jason Mittell initiated an experimental workshop on videographic criticism at Middlebury University, and co-founded the web destination *[in]Transition* along with Catherine Grant, Christian Keathley, and Drew Morton (Becker 127). *[in]Transition* is partnered under the *MediaCommons.org* banner. *Media Commons* shares space with additional sister sites, including the dialogic macro criticism journal *In Media Res*. The latter site has hosted several pro wrestling think pieces, including a 2015 topic week focused on “Hulk Hogan and the Cultural History of Racism in Wrestling” (Castleberry and Cramer). While this sample week engages ongoing probes into past-present multi-diversity problematics within the pro wrestling industry, *In Media Res* remains an open access archive that encourages unique approaches and assessments of media.

A Case for Television Studies

Recent decades demonstrate surging interest as well as creative and financial investment toward the medium of television. However, “television” is no longer a uniform medium. Instead, it has become complicated by Internet spreadability (Jenkins, Ford, and Green), the rise and fall of DVD boxed sets (Mittell, 37), the emergence of Internet streaming services, and the ongoing venture capitalist mergers amidst continuous diversification from competitive digital platforms like Amazon and Netflix. Notably, scholars fortified space for a television studies discipline years before mass audiences and corporate investors caught on to the “Peak TV” movement. During this emergence, the asynchronous dialogue between TV critics, scholars, industry insiders, and audiences narrowed just as open-sourced communication channels broadened. Jonathan Gray and Amanda Lotz represent two prominent contemporary TV scholar influencers with their 2012 book *Television Studies*. Together they formulated a television studies model that emphasizes overlap and accountability between programs, contexts, audiences, and institutions.

While critical cultural and media scholars have been writing about television since the advent of the medium—with much credit going to Raymond Williams,

Marshall McLuhan, Horace Newcomb, John Fiske, John Hartley, Lynn Spigel, Robert Allen, Annette Hill, and many others—TV studies emerges as a “primetime” discipline in an era when the last of high-brow and low-brow cultural markers have blended together in appreciation of televisual texts like HBO’s *The Wire* and *The Sopranos*, AMC’s *Breaking Bad* and *Mad Men*, or the quiet reserve and sophistication of BBC/PBS’s *Downton Abbey* and Netflix’s *The Crown*. The medium is the message now that students are witnessing the collapse of old stodgy professors and politicians suddenly willing to post spoilers and insert pop linguistics into Tweets and lectures alike. Additionally, while the framework of television studies served half a century in the making, Gray and Lotz astutely comprise TV’s scholarly history into one essential method that embraces the multi-platform digital convergence age and TV’s polyvalent position as a liminal medium. From a television studies perspective, pro wrestling would be studied for its programs, contexts, audiences, and industries.

Programs. Pro wrestling programming constitutes a text—or rather, a series of ongoing and overlapping and contradictory texts—that can be accessed and analyzed on a content level. Such techniques of “close reading” can be applied at the individual or character level, or to a group or faction (Brummett 3). An ongoing feud between competitors, typically the mythic storytelling alignment of face versus heel, offers an opportunity for scholars to analyze from positions of comparison and contrast, performance and reception, and the ultimate effectiveness of the program for individuals in the fans or company eyes. These hypothetical analytic impacts stress the significance of a television studies model, whereby the endpoint analysis of text almost inescapably merges into discussions of context, audience, and industry.

Contexts. Pro wrestling is, if nothing else, built upon the shoulders of context. Whether that context is “wrestlin” or “sports entertainment” or “strong style,” the way in which a company and its collective body project themselves matters. It matters to the organizers and the fans, and ultimately impacts the bottom line, or the financial means necessary to pay performers and continue providing entertainment services to consumer publics. Because pro wrestling history is tethered to the traveling circus, there is a designated low-brow cultural status associated with pro wrestling events. Despite occasional “high profile” appearances from celebrities, sports figures, and even politicians (including WWE Hall of Famer, Donald Trump). Wrestlers and wrestling fans are notably aware of

this status, and embrace its “outsider” reputation while others find a bit of shame or secrecy in such indulgence.

Audiences. Early in its relatively short history, pro wrestling studies shares a natural association with audience studies, also called perception studies. Audience and perception studies take interest in consumer perspectives, whether inquiring the financial, aesthetic, cultural, or political interests that audiences take in a specific rhetorical artifact or cultural phenomenon. Another way to close read the consumer is to identify the level of pleasure or enjoyment they take in a textual experience. Operating at a level of close affinity or involved passion is what Jenkins identifies as participatory culture, when an audience-consumer transitions from passive consumption to active participant. Here scholarly focus enters into the sub-discipline of fandom or fan studies. Scholars that practice fan studies are likely to bridge methods from ethnography, guerilla journalism, and other forms of qualitative research. The result ideally nets rich insights into distinct and perhaps clandestine rituals within varying fandoms. Fan communities are often “marked” by certain distinguishing factors, such as organically generated names like Trekkies, Whedonites, Losties, or Potterphiles.

Institutions. The last tier relating to a television studies model is the focus on institutions or industries. Industry studies is a smaller but equally important unit that is growing in recognition. Industry studies analyses tend to highlight how interrelated factors and operators and financiers each play pivotal roles in the creation and distribution of texts that are consumed by individuals and held in close collective favor as sacred artifacts. Industry inspections might assess creative or gatekeeper processes—the how’s and why’s some personnel or products receive more attention while others receive less—that dictate “textual legitimacy” (Castleberry 134) and even “temporal privilege” (135). Industry studies might also investigate the many tertiary modes of advertisement and circulation of information, from press releases to “free” internet videos. Industry analyses may explore how certain products proliferate or fail to find mass appeal. Scholarly focus on pro wrestling industry practices may draw from various industry resources, including magazines, fanzines, merchandizing, or even contemporary meta-media products like “dirt sheet” sites, podcasts, and even Twitter account histories or other social media metadata.

Applying TV Studies to Pro Wrestling

The television studies model can be applied to help explain the convergence culture phenomenon of Cody Rhodes' post-WWE career. One book that continues to circulate in academic conversations is Steven Johnson's *Everything Bad is Good for You: How Today's Popular Culture Is Actually Making Us Smarter*. The gist of Johnson's playful work is that popular entertainments—despite traditional American skepticism that they neuter intelligence—both stimulate and cognitively challenge people. Johnson coins concepts like “multiple threading” (65) and the “Sleeper Curve” (84) to demonstrate the vast quantities of information audiences must navigate to truly engage with the text.⁴ Multithreading recalls what TV scholar Jason Mittell calls “narrative complexity” (17). Writing in *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*, Mittell outlines how narrative complexity rejects “plot closure” and embraces “a range of serial techniques” that build over time (18). Such an approach bucks the traditional reliance upon “easy” conventional formulas and speaks to the increasing depth of creative investment and audience enjoyment with popular entertainment in the last twenty years.

Multithreading or narrative complexity can be understood within current pro wrestling: performers have histories that sometimes involve multiple personae across several companies. These storylines often linger, either directly or as a kind of spectral presence that haunts the performer's career. For example, see Dusty Rhodes' transition from “The American Dream” in the AWA to the “Common Man” in the WWF in the late 1980s (Dilbert). Overall, such information is nonessential to enjoying the text of wrestling, yet for fans these archival histories become ensconced into collective memory and nostalgic fandom. Such cases and oral histories have been mythologized for decades within wrestling circles, fanzines, and convention talks. Today, however, these narratives shift from marginal folk tales to social media trends and digitally archived historicities.

Fast-forward several decades past the Dusty Rhodes controversies to Dusty's son, Cody Rhodes, who musters the will to leave the financial security of the WWE due to creative differences over his diminished in-ring character, Stardust.

⁴ Johnson's theorization of a Sleeper Curve includes samples of how sitcoms have slowly evolved from a place of episodic convention, to the addition of in-jokes for steady viewers, to the outright meta-narratives many contemporary programs embrace.

The name Stardust already lacks invention as it merely functions as a spinoff to older brother Dustin's Goldust. The younger Rhodes brother seeks to rewrite his reputation with fans and for himself, yet legal tensions linger. WWE retains the copyright to his real name, "Cody Rhodes," and thus the son literally cannot possess his birthright title for entertainment purposes. Upon requested release, he elects creativity over legal entanglement, selecting the amended stage name, "Cody, the American Nightmare." Through this innovation, the son pays homage to the father's saga while carving an oppositional place for himself as a "free agent" throughout the independent wrestling scene.

As "The American Nightmare," Cody physically haunts the wrestling world's narrative dreamscape. His liminal status allows the character to peek in and out of companies at will; TNA Impact Wrestling, New Japan Pro Wrestling, Ring of Honor, and smaller organizations each welcome him. Cody's performances cumulatively spread across cable channels and syndicated stations: from PopTV to AXS, from Sinclair Broadcasting to njpdworld.com. Along the way, Rhodes happens to join up with the most popular smart mark underground wrestling faction in the world, the Bullet Club. Now Rhodes transcends traditional cable, pay cable, and syndicated coverage with appearances viewed by millions of streaming fans: YouTube and Twitter both feature the Bullet Club's indie sketch show, *Being the Elite*. With subsequent appearances and deepening of characterization, Rhodes experiences his most successful year as a pro wrestler outside of the coveted billion-dollar monopoly.

On a level of technological transcendence, Cody has self-actualized the American Dream (the U.S. ideology, if not also the stage name) by practicing what Jenkins, Ford, and Green call a "spreadable media" approach to mass communication. Moreover, audiences are following Cody, charting these personal pivots and digital dives. They listen over gossipy discussions emanating out of podcasts and YouTube shows. Active engagement spreads across numerous platforms in allegiance to Cody but also, quite simply, because this is now part of the evolving process of paratextual engagement and sustained aesthetic experience (Gray; Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington). Fans ritualized these multiplatform engagements both consciously and unconsciously, exhibiting multi-threading and dissecting narrative complexity even over such a "simple" and "brainless" entertainment as pro wrestling.

In some ways, Johnson's "bad things are good things" critique functions as a cultural retort to Neil Postman's conservative position. Postman reads the popular

writing on the wall as a dystopic sign of cultural regression, whereas Johnson wants to celebrate if not revel in the level of detail baked into contemporary entertainment. Yet arguments like Johnson's are far from foolproof. Indeed, much of the broad appeal of pro wrestling lies in the genre's simplicity: the straightforward act of heel versus face, and the contrast between the rhetorical oratory mic skills and the in-ring physicality. The genre machinations can be as simplistic as audiences prefer, and yet, for the über-fans densely layered intertextual histories and historicities speak to second tier interests in wrestling's ability to sustain the popular imagination over decades of storylines, encounters, monologues, and matches. For the die-hards, multi-threading becomes a challenge accepted, and each additional wrestler-company rebirth signals both their past and potential future. It is a meta-narrative, a dream logic, cooked into the fabric of American ideology. And as pro wrestling increasingly attaches its methods to divergent digital streaming and multi-platform strategies, pro wrestling scholars need to consider all angles such implications present.

More specifically to a TV studies analytical approach, scholars could distinguish whether the text is represented by the Cody persona, the canon of his body of work, or individual segments that appear in isolation. However, because a TV studies model assumes information across varying source origins, scholars should consider Cody's brand-jumping liminality a pivotal point of conversation about the nature and form of the contemporary pro wrestler. The context for his WWE release and willful reinvention demands that scholars pay close attention to the physical and digital intersections that straddle diverse programs, media markets, merchandizing outlets, and digital platforms. Cody the character functions as a spreadable model while Cody the person succeeds as a flexible entrepreneur. His father's storied history compounds this narrative in textual and meta-textual ways, thus requiring cultural context to be understood as prerequisite to fan if not scholarly appreciation.

This further suggests how cultural context interlaces with fan or audience roles. The Cody case study offers a rich translation of the benefits of a multi-angular TV studies model of analysis. The originality of the text and the richness of the cultural context of *The American Nightmare* fuel smart mark fan interest in the public persona of Cody. Cody's supernatural success outside the mainstream marketing of WWE highlights the economic and commercial value driven by consumer-fans. Yet because consumer-fans and wrestling texts do not operate in a

vacuum creative space, the organizational bodies that negotiate these rules of engagement must also be researched and recorded.

To bring the Cody case study to conclusion at least temporarily, traditional rules and restrictions regulate pro wrestler freedoms and creative rights. Some industry codes are intended to restrict self-marketing and self-branding initiatives, while for most of the indie scene, digital tools now serve to generate social, cultural, and ultimately economic capital. Cody's ability to manage his individual brand in an upward trajectory demonstrates not only the vitality of spreadable media modalities but also the ways in which industry engines operate at both the macro and micro level. Thus, scholars performing a TV studies model of analysis must consider each of these four criteria of content, context, audience, and industry into simultaneous and dialogic consideration.

Concluding Synergy between Pro Wrestling and Popular Culture Studies

The intent of this essay is to widen the range of possible analytic directions for emerging and continuing professional wrestling scholars. Part of popular culture's strength lies in its elasticity across cultures, borders, identities, and differences. However, pop culture is ubiquitous in a sense because it contains different meanings and associations to various groups and individuals.

Likewise, professional wrestling represents a microcosm of similar elasticity. The sounds and images of events connect audiences as they intimate visual and physical storytelling. It is useful to note how and why—from lower-class kitsch to high-art auteur expression—many art forms have collapsed over time into what cultural theorists call monoculture. In this same vein, recognizing the pedagogical potential that pro wrestling affords could benefit classrooms struggling to retain creative interest from students. Professional wrestling syndicates have always understood the common tongue of pop culture storytelling. If Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson's meteoric rise to Hollywood superstardom and John Cena's mimetic transmedia global popularity is any indication, the translation of the pro wrestling formula to mainstream pop culture appeal is verifiable and replicable. Now if we can only get those stuffy cantankerous lecturers to smell what the pro wrestling scholars are cooking, higher education might gain the upper advantage

in the larger culture wars in a reverse flip to redeem the “value” of education in two-headed arenas of public opinion and consumer trust.

I recall once more how the Mad Man, my wily veteran dissertation advisor, understood the significance of pop culture and even wrestling symbolism. He could tow the performative line within the seminar space without losing the rigor or the audience. And that’s the bottom line—because education, for many, now exists as a social, cultural, and economic commodity. Much like pro wrestling.

Works Cited

- Adorno, Theodore, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, and George Lukacs. *Aesthetics and Politics: The Key Texts of the Classic Debate within German Marxism*. 2nd ed., Verso, 1986.
- Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. Translated by Anette Lavers, Hill and Wang, 1972.
- Berelson, Bernard. *Content Analysis in Communication Research*. Hafner Publishing Company, 1971.
- Becker, Christine. "Introduction: Transforming Scholarship through [in]Transition." *Cinema Journal*, vol. 56, no. 4, 2017, pp. 126-129.
- Berger, Arthur Asa. *Signs in Contemporary Culture*. Sheffield Publishing Co., 1999/1984.
- Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. Penguin Books, 1987.
- Brummett, Barry. *Techniques of Close Reading*. Sage, 2010.
- . *The Rhetoric of Popular Culture*. 2nd ed., Sage, 2006.
- Buckwood, Clint. "WWE: Legitimacy Explained, Putting the Sport Back in Sports Entertainment," *Bleacher Report*. April 25, 2012.
<http://bleacherreport.com/articles/1160805-wwe-legitimacy-explained-putting-the-sport-back-in-sports-entertainment>.
- Buonanno, Milly. *The Age of Television: Experiences and Theories*. Translated by Jennifer Radice, University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Butler, Jeremy. *Television Style*. Routledge, 2010.
- . *Television: Critical Methods and Applications*. 3rd ed., Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2007.

Caldwell, James. "New Japan announces streaming service like WWE Network, will include live shows." *PWTorch*, 1 Dec. 2014, https://www.pwtorch.com/artman2/publish/Other_News_4/article_82044.shtml#.WnroD2bMxE8. Accessed 17 Feb. 2018.

Castleberry, Garret. "Game(s) of Fandom: The Hyperlink Labyrinths that Paratextualize *Game of Thrones* Fandom." *Television, Social Media, and Fan Culture*, edited by Alison Slade, Amber J. Narro, and Dedria Givens-Carroll, Lexington Books, 2015, pp. 127-45.

---. "Performing Meta-Catharsis: Hulk Hogan's 'Redemption' Arc as Racist Apologia." *In Media Res, A Media Commons Project*, 2015, <http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/imr/2015/10/05/performing-meta-catharsis-hulk-hogans-redemption-arc-racist-apologia>. Accessed 17 Feb. 2018.

Castleberry, Garret and Lauren Cramer (Eds.). "Hulk Hogan and the Cultural History of Racism in Wrestling." *In Media Res, A Media Commons Project*, 2015, <http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/imr/theme-week/2015/41/hulk-hogan-and-cultural-history-racism-wrestling-october-5-9-2015>. Accessed 17 Feb. 2018.

Chow, Broderick, Eero Lane, and Claire Warden (Eds.). *Performance and Professional Wrestling*. Routledge, 2016.

Danesi, Marcel. *Popular Culture: Introductory Perspectives*. 3rd ed., Roman and Littlefield, 2015.

Davis, Aeron. *Promotional Cultures*. Polity, 2013.

Dilbert, Ryan. "Breaking Down the Greatness of Dusty Rhodes' 'Hard Times' Promo." *Bleacher Report*, 18 June 2015, <http://bleacherreport.com/articles/2499841-breaking-down-the-greatness-of-dusty-rhodes-famous-hard-times-promo>. Accessed 17 Feb. 2018.

Dundas, Chad. "Ever Wonder Why Professional Wrestling is Fake?" *Signature Reads*, 27 July 2016, <http://www.signature-reads.com/2016/07/ever-wonder-why-professional-wrestling-is-fake>. Accessed 17 Feb. 2018.

- Eagleton, Terry. "Psychoanalysis," In *Literary Theory: An Introduction, Anniversary Edition*. University of Minnesota Press, 2008.
- Fathallah, Judith May. *Fanfiction and the Author: How Fanfic Changes Popular Culture Texts*. University of Chicago Press, 2017.
- Fishman, Scott. "Former WWE Star Bully Ray on His Surprising Ring of Honor Arrival." *TV Insider*, 8 Mar. 2017, <https://www.tvinsider.com/134861/bully-ray-ring-of-honor-wrestling-roh>. Accessed 17 Feb. 2018.
- Fiske, John. *Television Culture*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2011.
- Fraade-Blanar, Zoe and Aaron M. Glazer. "Pro-Wrestling fans are experts at authenticity." *Quatrz*, 25 Apr. 2017, <https://qz.com/967397/pro-wrestling-fans-are-experts-on-authenticity>. Accessed 17 Feb. 2018.
- Freud, Sigmund. *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis: 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle,' 'The Ego and the Id' and Other works*. Penguin Books, 1991.
- Goffman, Irving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Doubleday, 1956.
- Goldberg, Michelle. "This Is What Happens When You Slash Funding for Public Universities." *The Nation*, 19 May 2015, <https://www.thenation.com/article/gentrification-higher-ed>. Accessed 17 Feb. 2018.
- Gray, Jonathan. *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts*. New York University Press, 2010.
- Gray, Jonathan and Amanda Lotz. *Television Studies*. Polity, 2012.
- Gray, Jonathan, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington (Eds.). *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*. 2nd ed., New York University Press, 2017.
- Holstein, James A. and Jaber F. Gubrium. *Varieties of Narrative Analysis*. Sage, 2011.

- Horton, Aaron. (Ed.). *Identity in Professional Wrestling: Essays on Nationality, Race, and Gender*. McFarland Press, 2018.
- Howells, Richard and Joaquim Negreiros. *Visual Culture*. 2nd ed., Polity, 2012.
- Jenkins, Henry, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green. *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*. New York University Press, 2013.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York University Press, 2006.
- . *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press, 2006.
- . *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. Routledge, 1992.
- Johnson, Steven. *Everything Bad Is Good for You: How Today's Popular Culture Is Actually Making Us Smarter*. Riverhead Books, 2005.
- Krippendorff, Klaus. *Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodologies*. Sage Publications, 1980.
- LeGreca, Dave and Doug Mortman (Co-creators). "Busted Open Radio." SiriusXM Radio. New York, 2008-present.
- Leverette, Marc, Brian L. Ott, and Cara Louise Buckley (Eds.). *It's Not TV: Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era*. Routledge, 2008.
- Levi-Strauss, Claude (with Wendy Doniger). *Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture*. Schocken Books, 1995/1978.
- Lotz, Amanda. *Cable Guys: Television and Masculinity in the 21st Century*. New York University Press, 2014.
- Marcus, Steven. *Freud and the Culture of Psychoanalysis*. W. W. Norton and Company, 1987.
- Mirzoeff, Nicholas. *Visual Culture: An Introduction*. Routledge, 2009.

- Mitchell, Brian C. "Think NEH and NEA Funding is only a Federal Issue? Think Again." *The Huffington Post*, 24 Jan. 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-brian-c-mitchell/think-neh--nea-funding-is_b_14346016.html. Accessed 17 Feb. 2018.
- Mittell, Jason. *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York University Press, 2015.
- . *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture*. Routledge, 2004.
- Postman, Neil. *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. 25th anniversary ed., Penguin Books, 2005/1985.
- Rainie, Lee and Barry Wellman. *Networked: The New Social Operating System*. MIT Press, 2014.
- Reissman, Catherine Kohler. *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. Sage, 2008.
- Rose, Gillian. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*. 2nd ed., Sage, 2007.
- Ruben, Adam. "Scientists should defend, not defund, the Humanities." *Science Magazine*, 23 Sept. 2015, <http://www.sciencemag.org/careers/2015/09/scientists-should-defend-not-defund-humanities>. Accessed 17 Feb. 2018.
- Sammond, Nicholas (Ed.). *Steel Chair to the Head: The Pleasure and Pain of Professional Wrestling*. Duke University Press, 2005.
- Shoemaker, David. "Requiem for the Dream: Dusty Rhodes, 1945-2015." *Grantland*, 12 June 2015, <http://grantland.com/the-triangle/requiem-for-the-dream-dusty-rhodes-rip-obituary-wwe-nwa-professional-wrestling-ric-flair-harvey-race>. Accessed 17 Feb. 2018.
- . (as "The Masked Man") "Pro Wrestling for Auteurs: How documentary films explain WWE's Reality Era." *Grantland*, 23 May 2012,

- <http://grantland.com/features/how-documentary-films-explain-wwe-reality-era-preview-weekend-limit-pay-per-view>. Accessed 17 Feb. 2018.
- Slade, Alison, Amber J. Narro, and Dedria Givens-Carroll. (Eds.). *Television, Social Media, and Fan Culture*. Lexington Books, 2015.
- Smith, Ashley A. "Zeroed Out in Arizona." *Inside Higher Education*, 12 Mar. 2015, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/03/12/arizona-unprecedented-defunding-community-colleges>. Accessed 17 Feb. 2018.
- Weber, Robert Philip. *Basic Content Analysis, 2nd edition*. Sage, 1990.
- Williams, Ian. "Kurt Angle's WWE Documentary is as Real as Pro Wrestling Gets." *Vice*, 18 July 2017, https://sports.vice.com/en_ca/article/8xae74/kurt-angles-wwe-documentary-is-as-real-as-pro-wrestling-gets. Accessed 17 Feb. 2018.
- Wright, Joshua. "STEM Majors Are Accelerating in Every State, Just as Humanities Degrees are Declining." *Emsi*, 1 Sept. 2017, <http://www.economicmodeling.com/2017/09/01/stem-majors-accelerating-every-state-just-humanities-degrees-declining>. Accessed 17 Feb. 2018.